

Sheila Guisano Soto
12 Fairview St Apt 2
New Britain, CT 06051

Appropriations Committee --- February 16, 2017
D.S.S. Funding for Nursing Homes & Caregivers

Dear Members of the Appropriations Committee,

My name is Sheila Guisano Soto. I've worked as a certified nursing assistant in a nursing home in New Britain for 9 years. I am here to say 'THANK YOU' to this Committee for your past support for nursing home frontline workers. Your help in the 2015-2016 budget changed my life. But I am concerned that the Governor's budget proposal for the next two years could undo that progress, so I am here to urge you to fully fund nursing home care and the caregivers like me who provide that care.

Until 6 months ago, I was paid only \$13.50 an hour. I have a family and 4 wonderful kids who were doing great in school. But because of the low pay, we were living paycheck to paycheck -- I didn't even have money to take them out for ice cream or a movie to celebrate their good grades. Half the time, we had to skip paying the light bill or the gas bill so we could just make rent.

Two years ago, the Appropriations Committee proposed funding targeted specifically to improve job standards for front-line nursing home workers who have long been underpaid for the important work we do. Because of you and that wage enhancement funding, my co-workers and I were able to make real progress. Today I am making \$15 dollars an hour and I have a retirement pension for the first time ever. My credit rating was bad because I was always late on paying bills, but now I am paying off debts and repairing my credit score. I used to feel like I was always behind, just trying to keep my head above water. It's really stressful living that way. Now I feel like, finally, I'm on solid ground. It's not like I'm rich, or even comfortable—but since I got the raise, I've been able to pay my rent on time. I can breathe a little easier. Thank you!

People tell me I should go to school and be a nurse so I can earn more money, but the truth is I LOVE my job taking care of the elderly. For many nursing home residents, we are not just their caregivers, we are their family. But we can't focus on our nursing home residents when we are so distracted worrying about taking care of our family at home.

Now the Governor's budget proposal would eliminate re-basing for nursing homes, so they won't get any funding increases even though the costs for food, heat, and power are increasing. That will mean the nursing home owners will instead turn to us looking for pay cuts, layoffs and reduced hours -- all of which leads to worse care for seniors.

I am concerned that all the progress we just made to make nursing home jobs into good-quality jobs could be undone. Please fully fund our nursing homes so caregivers and the people we care for live with the dignity we deserve.